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ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity and cultural plurality are considered today to be the backbone and passion of many multicultural education programs in the United States. Idiosyncratic and parochial needs of specific racial, ethnic, and other self-interest groups are studied as distinctive entities. In some cases, they are treated uniquely in what has been characterized as cross-cultural education. Mainstream multicultural programs are not viewed within the context of social and human experiences whose outcomes enrich and advance the totality of existing values in a cultural plurality. Mono-cultural, bi-cultural, and cross-cultural programs each represent one perspective on a multicultural continuum. In contrast, a humanistic cultural learning experience embraces a commitment to the universality of human condition and the universality of human needs and beliefs that transcend color, race, gender, age, and ideological boundaries. An interdisciplinary approach among liberal arts, the humanities, natural sciences, life and social sciences should confer to students a basic knowledge in all of these areas within the context of a multicultural education. It should promote understanding of and respect for human experiences within particular eco-systems and divergent cultures in time and space; develop objectivity and critical judgment as well as the need for continuing studies and observation. Finally, multicultural education should develop a commitment to the preservation of human rights for all, irrespective of ideological boundaries, creed, race, age, or gender. Contains 18 references. (Author/DK)

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A HUMANIST IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

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A HUMANIST IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

Mono-cultural, bi-cultural, pluri-cultural and cross-cultural programs represent one perspective on a multicultural continuum. In contrast, a humanistic cultural learning experience embraces a commitment to the universality of human condition and the universality of human needs and beliefs which transcend color, race, gender, age and ideological boundaries.

An interdisciplinary approach among liberal arts, the humanities, natural sciences, life and social sciences should confer to students a basic knowledge in all of these areas within the context of a multicultural education. It should promote understanding of and respect for human experiences within particular eco-systems and divergent cultures in time and space; develop objectivity and critical judgment as well as the need for continuing studies and observation. Last but not least, it should develop a commitment to the preservation of human rights for all - irrespective of ideological boundaries, creed or race, age or gender.

A HUMANIST IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Cultural diversity and cultural plurality are considered today to be the backbone and passion of many multicultural education programs in the United States. Idiosyncratic and parochial needs of specific racial, ethnic and other self-interest groups are studied as distinctive entities. In some cases, they are uniquely treated in what has been characterized as cross-cultural education (Saravia-Shore and Arvizo,1992). Mainstream multicultural programs are not viewed within the context of social and human experiences whose outcomes enrich and advance the totality of existing values in a cultural plurality.

Higher levels of collective human understanding is needed if we are to resolve many of the human and social conflicts which threaten chances for humanistic equity and peace. Hence, a viable multicultural education program must move beyond the limitations imposed by race, ethnicity and gender as historically has been the case (Garcia, 1982). Emphasis is needed on individual and universal values, inherent in every culture. This provides a human thread in a commonality of experiences which links all peoples in the world.

This perspective is manifested today in a growing socio-political and economic interconnectedness, interdependence and integration of efforts to find appropriate solutions for shared and common global concerns. Namely, the protection of the global environment; the preservation of human rights for all; the containment of nuclear proliferation, the treatment of AIDS, and the opening up of new shared frontiers in science and space.

As noted in a position statement on global education by the National Council for the Social Studies, a relation is established between a global education and mutliculturalism:

> " that the human experience is an increasingly global phenomenon in which people are constantly being influenced by transnational, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic interrelations" (National Council for the Social Studies, 1982, p. 37).

Inadvertently, "multicultural education" today is disjunctive by emphasizing "mono-culturalism, cross-culturalism, pluri-culturalism or bi-culturalism" when referring to the cultural plurality of experiences of individuals and groups. A more accurate characterization, in keeping with a classical and humanistic tradition focuses on the commonality and universality of Man's basic human needs and proclivities. In this way,

multicultural education can be viewed as evolving on a dynamic continuum where opportunity exists for people to continuously evolve on expanding cultural identities from mono-cultural, bi-cultural, cross-cultural and pluri-cultural to muticulturalism (Pusch, 1979).

Culture emanating from Man's spirit and life exigencies within any given spatial and temporal environment becomes a collective identity, a way of life, a norm which entails common characteristics in meeting common human needs. The term culture designates the whole complex pattern of ideas, achievements, traditions and characteristics of humans in a variety of forms of collectivity in time and space. Multicultural education thus, ought to mirror the culture of Man - la condition humaine" - and the outcomes of human creativity as they evolve over time and space. Conditions that transform or constrain the specific cultural developments as observed in various distinctive cultures.

In sum, multicultural education should transmit to the young mind concurrently (a) the acceptance of a commonality in a universal human experience and (b) an understanding and acceptance of a racial and ethnic cultural uniqueness and distinctiveness. This paradigm creates a multicultural system that "sweeps in" and acknowledges the concomitant distinctiveness and commonality of fundamental human experiences, characteristics and behavior. A unified and comprehensive world view "in and bout Man" is no less significant than the life forces that created the conditions for cultural distinctiveness.

HUMANISM AS A WORLD VIEW

Deeply embedded in the study of the humanities and in the study of humanities is the notion that Man is the measure of all things. This world view or Weltanschauung is particularly discernible in Ancient Greek thought and during the Renaissance Period (Bernal, 1991). Concerned with Man's creative capabilities and human experiences, the humanities include the study of history - civilizations and cultures - the study of philosophy, religion, language, philology and the arts.

Nor are the fields of the natural and social sciences viewed as a distinct, isolated human activity immune and apart from the influences and pressures of the Zeitgeist, the climate of the times at any given point in history. The humanist would argue that each area of human activity - be it science, technology or philosophy - is interrelated with and affected by the other. This human condition is a fundamental and profound harmonious complementary . As noted by Barbara Ward:

> "Man inhabits two worlds. One is the natural world of plants and animals, of soil and airs and waters which

preceded him by billions of years and of which he is part. The other is the world of social institutions and artifacts he builds for himself, using his tools and engineers, his science and his dreams to fashion an environment obedient to human purpose and direction." (Ward and Dubos, 1972, p.1).

In all areas of knowing and of human creativity, the humanist also encompasses the symbolic conceptions and artistic representations of reality. A number of world views are taken as axiomatic. They can co-exist and complement each other in harmony, since the humanist views each Weltanschauung - world view as a symbolic representation of reality.

"The humanities honor the past for its own sake, view knowledge as broadening our human perspective, rather than serving immediate, instrumental needs and always seek out the human "voice" which is behind and animates technology, science and social structures. The humanities see history as shaped by human consciousness and conceptualize technology and economic structure as products of human creativity rather than as categories with lives (meanings) and wills of their own" (Johnson, 1985, p. 19).

Broadly defined the study of the humanities is a record and interpretation of Man's achievements and failures, struggles and triumphs. It comprises a record of Man's achievements in every sphere, whether it be political, economic, intellectual, artistic or social. It embraces also a chronicle of his dreams and ideals, his hopes, triumphs and failures. Most important of all, it includes an inquiry into political and economic movements, a search for the forces that propelled Man toward the great human undertakings, an explanation for his successes and failures (Burns, 1968).

Subjective speculations are necessary complements to objective critical inquiry. As John Dewey pointed out, the scientific attitude demands a skeptical and inquiring approach toward all issues and a refusal to form conclusive judgments until all available evidence has been amassed and examined. The study of the humanities is a harmonious complementary of objective and subjective critical inquiry. Human subjective judgments are no less scientific than objective observations and measurements.

HUMANISM AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

In contrast to the humanist world view, American multicultural education today continues:

1. to evolve in a prevailing Western paradigm of an economic, secular, urban and legal framework which holds to models of analytical interpretations offered by the social sciences.

2. to pursue a causal explanation and justification for multicultural programs based upon the social science models of analytical simplification.

3. to make educational decisions in multicultural education grounded in philosophical pragmatism and economic and political expediency.

Humanism recognizes the commonality in all human experience and the study of the humanities which captures all cultural manifestations becomes thus, the bedrock of multicultural education. Humanism is intrinsically linked to any meaning given to multicultural education and is critically embedded in any program committed to the education of a young mind.

Unfortunately, the significance in the historical and cultural legacy embedded in the body of knowledge of the humanities and classical studies has not fully recognized and developed in the education of teachers and in classroom course content. A number of possible explanations have been advanced ranging from (1) the eminence of science, economics and technology to the downgrading of history, literature, culture and the arts; (2) professional specialization's that are discipline based; (3) specific certification requirements of State Boards and (4) the emphasis on the marketability of a degree in education.

The Report of the Commission on the Humanities and a Report on the Humanities in Higher Education stated that the humanities have long been neglected and downgraded and are seldom considered an important area of study in teacher education no less in the education of young people .

Incorporating the humanities into the total educational experience of an individual advances knowledge that affects the human condition on a world wide scale. A humanistic cultural learning experience integrates and transforms mono-cultural, bi-cultural, cross-cultural and pluri-cultural perspectives into a unified multicultural paradigm. In sum, acquiring and utilizing this humanistic learning experience creates of its own accord a natural social process that creates and coalesces an educational curriculum into a total commitment toward a "community of learning".

A CONCEPTION FOR A PARTICULAR HUMANIST

Mutliculturalism is a conceptual inquiry into human growth and development on the widest possible scale in education. It embodies a speculative theoretical conception that deeply values broad ranging novel

ideas. Weltanschauungen change over time. New theories are spawned continuously, as new technologies open new horizons to scientific investigations. A conceptual humanist perspective in multicultural education prefers to challenge known facts and ideas. A resulting critical inquiry generates confrontation and argumentation as a means of rising above parochial and idiosyncratic positions. All fields of knowledge are interrelated. It is equally apparent that learning and teaching is value constituted, holistic, imaginative, multicausal, problematic and finally, primarily concerned with humanity.

Above all, a humanist values the creation of novel conceptual possibilities, schemata and hypotheses which allow us to revise, rethink and challenge even the most firmly entrenched and accepted ideas. This theoretical humanistic conception to multicultural education accepts that individuals must always be free to think and invent the unthinkable in order to ferret out and challenge our most cherished, taken for granted ideas and assumptions (Duhem, 1954 and Feyerabend, 1975).

On an interpersonal level, namely, within the context of intersubjectivity, an individual exposed to a humanistic cultural experience reacts with less fear and antagonism toward cultural diversity and the unknown, having gained a broader understanding, acceptance and tolerance toward "the culturally different". Xenophobic attitudes lessen. The intersubjective world of the young mind is not a private world. It is interactive and common to all. Intersubjectivity transforms a macro-conceptual humanist to a micro-particular humanist on a interpersonal level.

If a conceptual humanist perspective is applied to the individual as the unit of analysis (a particular humanist), it captures the essence of how the individual student pursues the understanding of other minds; other selves; reciprocity, mutual understanding and communication between peoples (Kilmann and Mitroff, 1977). As noted, a concept that captures the essence of this view is intersubjectivity:

> ..."It exists because we live in it as men among other men, bound to them through common influence and work, understanding others and being understood by them" (Schutz, 1973, p. 10).

Thus, a multicultural education grounded in the conception of humanism infuses the student with an intense concern to capture and describe the uniqueness of particular individual human beings. Every human is treated as unique not to be compared with anyone or anything else. The ultimate goal is to help each person to know himself or herself uniquely and

to achieve his/her own self determination within the confines of a given life space.

These humanistic and philosophical orientations are most parsimonious in integrating the humanities into multicultural education. his results in a humanistic cultural learning experience of five dimensions of contemporary educational strategies adapted from Rowan's conception: (1) ontological development (2) reflection, reasoning and speculation (3) experimentation, (4) dialectic discourse and (5) communication (Rowan, 1976).

1. ***Course of student development (ontogeny):*** It is the sum of a student's total life objective and subjective experiences expressed in an integration of knowledge, idealizations, expectations, perceptions and feelings. A convergence of global and parochial perspectives and an acceptance of the commonality and diversity of the human experience, raises the student's understanding and sensitivity toward others. It calls for a higher, richer and more advanced level of human growth and development.

2. ***Student's Reflect, reason and speculate (cogitate):*** Thinking is value laden in that students are encouraged to speculate in new and different ways while interacting with others. Thinking about interrelations with others also involves rational choices that enhance and enrich social and human interactions.

3. ***Social means to human ends (projects):*** Individuals and groups design experimental school projects that invest the individual fully in a group project; that risks something personal in contributing and participating toward changing social patterns and human relations. A curriculum is designed to take educational risks.

4. ***Open and free expressions (dialectic discourse):*** Student's are provided with the optimal conditions for an open and free expression of their beliefs, values and interests in a non-coercive learning and teaching environment. Conflicts are inevitable and desirable if transformed into mutual social growth and human development. It is expected that changes will take place over time as learning and teaching needs change in development.

5. ***information transfer: (communication):*** Students and teachers involved share these educational alternatives, goals and objectives with others in the curriculum so that all can learn and develop together. The intent is that this experience reinforces and strengthens the human subjective bonds within and between participants.

These five educational strategies for infusing into the curriculum a

humanistic cultural learning experience are mutually inclusive, are coalesced and interdependent. For example, communication with others in the curriculum (i.e. social studies, math, science etc.) is not an end to the process, but can very well be the beginning. No one area of study occupies a privileged or more desirable status in the curriculum. Hence, multicultural education is not autonomous and independent from other areas of study but is an intrinsic part of the overall curriculum. (Reagan, 1981).

A common theme that permeates these dimensions is to promote student's human development through personal, value constituted activity which is a critical component to education. This theme accentuates the continuity in human growth and development while promoting the prospects for human and social change through education. Thus, the overall educational strategy is to create an individual humanist; that is, to help a student know oneself uniquely within the context of a holistic concern, interest and commitment to humanity.

CURRICULAR PROGRAM GOALS AND CURRICULAR GUIDELINES

The goal of a curriculum program is to implant, infuse and submerge students in an educational climate of a humanistic cultural learning experience (Walsh, 1979). This will serve as the first and most important step in the student's liberation from the constraints of his/her own culture and in the understanding of a wider community of mankind. In addition, this accentuates an understanding and acceptance of the dynamics of cultural distinctiveness while it enlightens and emancipates a student from parochialism.

Immersion into a humanistic multicultural learning experience necessitates a total interpolation and submersion of the teacher and student into the content and process from an emotive and cognitive perspective before it can be internalized, transformed and reflected in modified attitudes and behavior. The concept of immersion is critical to cultural and multicultural experiences. A student cannot become immersed into new cultural perspectives unless proper materials are acquired and utilized in creative learning activities and experiences by teachers who are themselves immersed in the subject.

A broad array of resource materials, including books, games, computer activities (i.e. simulations) and curricular strategies are available to teachers who wish to introduce multicultural education to students (Tiedt, 1990). Most need to be developed, others are available through educational resource companies; some are flexible and adaptable to a variety of teaching and learning situations.

a. ***Multicultural notes*** An informative publication for teachers that

could appear three times over the school year and features a variety of multicultural topics that cut across the spectrum of the curriculum. This includes bibliographies and lesson plans on a range of subjects relating to humanities on a global scale.

b. ***multicultural pack:*** A well-designed packet of community based cultural materials for teaching that can be used individually or with an entire class; for example, visual and graphs; texts, documents. slides; videotapes.

c. ***multicultural worksheets:*** A complete and creative curriculum guide that includes a variety of student worksheets and activities on the humanities and culture; for example, interactive classroom lectures coupled with hands-on activities that promote critical thinking.

d. ***multicultural skills:*** A curriculum unit that includes general knowledge skills for teaching multicultural tasks, terms and concepts as well as concrete activities related to a culturally diverse society.

e. ***multicultural workbooks:*** An interdisciplinary approach to present multicultural concepts that incorporates social, natural and synthetic sciences, art history, music and literature emphasizing problem solving in workbooks and exercises ("brainbooster activity"). Answers to thought provoking questions are revealed by a hand held decoder.

f. ***multicultural time capsule:*** An interactive unit that focuses on preserving American culture within the context of multiple cultures. Students decide what is representative of their culture, construct a time capsule and next generation (i.e. another class) discovers the capsule and analyzes the content.

SUMMARY

Mono-cultural, bi-cultural, pluri-cultural and cross-cultural programs represent one perspective on a multicultural continuum. In contrast, a humanistic cultural learning experience embraces a commitment to the universality of human condition and the universality of human needs and beliefs which transcend color, race, gender, age and ideological boundaries. Embedded in a humanistic multicultural educational program is the ideal and notion that Man is the most significant entity in the universe. The humanistic view interprets and regards the world in terms of human values and experiences.

Fundamental human needs include the need for survival and procreation coupled with altruism; the need to interrelate and interact with fellow men and the environment; the need to imbue the unknown with spiritual and supernatural qualities; the need to order and reorder natural and man-made phenomena; the need to preserve a healthy mind in a healthy body and last but not least, to know oneself.

An interdisciplinary approach among liberal arts, the humanities, natural sciences, life and social sciences should confer to students a basic knowledge in all of these areas within the context of a multicultural education. It should promote understanding of and respect for human experiences within particular eco-systems and divergent cultures in time and space; develop objectivity and critical judgment as well as the need for continuing studies and observation; foster creativity, self-discipline, tolerance toward cultural diversity and the acceptance of a commonality of human needs and experiences.

Last but not least, it should develop a commitment to the preservation of human rights for all - irrespective of ideological boundaries, creed or race, age or gender.

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